



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

For immediate release: Nov. 2, 2005 (05-50)
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WSDA urges Washington poultry and bird owners to report signs of disease

OLYMPIA — Because of growing concerns over the spread of avian influenza and the possibility it could mutate into a flu that is contagious and fatal to humans, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) is urging poultry producers and bird owners to take precautionary measures to protect their flocks and report any signs of illness or sudden death.

Dr. Leonard Eldridge, state veterinarian, encourages owners to report signs of illness among birds, such as sneezing, coughing, nasal discharge, diarrhea, listlessness and sudden death. To report disease, owners can contact the state veterinarian's office at (360) 902-1878, the U.S. Department of Agriculture at (360) 753-9430, or their private veterinarian.

Neither low pathogenic nor the more serious highly pathogenic avian influenza (AI) has been detected in any Washington state flocks. Washington-produced poultry meat and eggs are safe for human consumption. Avian influenza is a contagious virus affecting many species of domestic and wild birds. Although it may not be possible to determine the source of infection, the most likely source is migratory waterfowl, which are natural hosts for influenza viruses.

Earlier this week, a form of H5 avian flu virus was found in wild birds in British Columbia. B.C.'s chief veterinarian, Dr. Ron Lewis, said it was "very unlikely" that the H5 virus found in these samples is the same pathogenic strain from Asia that has killed more than 60 people who were in close contact with sick birds. Lewis said the samples were taken from young, healthy birds and he stressed they did not pose a threat to human health.

Laboratory testing is needed to confirm avian influenza because signs of the disease can mimic other poultry and bird diseases. State or federal veterinarians can work with private veterinary practitioners, bird owners and poultry producers at no charge to collect samples for testing and diagnosis.

Washington state poultry producers and bird owners should review and strengthen biosecurity measures to ensure that all feasible precautions are taken to prevent the introduction of avian influenza and other bird diseases. Bird and poultry owners are encouraged to heed the following biosecurity practices:

- Don't keep pet birds on commercial poultry operations. Don't allow employees to maintain their own birds or poultry. Do not attend auctions or sales where birds are sold.
- Avoid visiting other poultry operations. If you must loan tools or equipment, ensure the items are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected prior to use again on your premises.
- Maintain good records on purchases and sales. If a disease problem arises, these documents can help animal health officials track and contain disease faster.
- Submit birds to a diagnostic laboratory whenever unusual disease occurs. For details on submitting sick, dying or dead birds, consult with Dr. A. Singh Dhillon, director, WSU's Avian Health and Food Safety Laboratory in Puyallup at (253) 445-4537.

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- Keep poultry houses locked and allow entry only to essential personnel. If dealers must enter your farm, insist that crates and trucks are clean and never allow dealers' crates to be placed in your houses.
- Animals should not be allowed access to poultry buildings. Work with a pest control professional to keep wild birds and rodents out of poultry houses.
- Dispose of dead birds either by incineration, composting, rendering or burial. Never dispose of them in fields and do not allow them to pile up. Do not spread manure from any flock that has experienced illness and mortality within the previous three weeks, unless the manure is composted properly.

A good resource for biosecurity tips is the Web site for the University of California Davis School of Veterinary Medicine Cooperative Extension. Go to <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vetext/home.html> and select "Poultry Biosecurity Resource Forum."

Other resources for biosecurity advice and avian influenza can be found at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/birdbiosecurity/> and <http://pandemicflu.gov>.

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